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AGRICULTURE DEPARTMENT'S CROP REPORTS
PROMOTE FAIR TRADE IN FARM PRODUCTS

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Ever since Civil War days, when unscrupulous speculators tried to turn upset conditions in the farm produce market to their advantage, the U. S. Department of Agriculture has been putting out official crop reports. These reports give the estimated acreages planted to the various crops, prospective crop yields and production, stocks of all crops and numbers of livestock on hand, and other agricultural facts gathered from one end of the country to the other. Issued periodically, they are designed to put farmers on an equal bargaining basis with buyers and to reduce speculation in buying and selling farm produce.

The first crop report, in 1863, was compiled from brief questionnaires sent to about 2,000 farmers scattered through 22 States. Their answers enabled the Commissioner of Agriculture, newly appointed by President Lincoln, to announce officially that there would be no food shortage. Today more than 600,000 farmers and about 200,000 non-farmers, such as merchants and mill operators, fill out and return questionnaires covering such items as acreage, yield, production, utilization, sales, price, and value of more than 100 field and orchard crops, as well as the numbers and value of livestock, the quantity and value of livestock products, like milk, eggs, and wool, the movement of farm products, and prices paid by farmers for their supplies and for labor. These volunteer reporters receive no pay from the Government for taking time from their regular work to fill out long and often involved forms. Their cooperation generally is actuated by a strong, public spirited interest in such matters. Some have given this faithful service for 30, 40, and even 50 years. In many families the job is handed down from father to son.

Every State in the Union is covered by a field crop reporting force. One office - in Boston, Mass. - covers the New England States; one - in College Park, Md. - covers Delaware and Maryland; and one - in Salt Lake City, Utah - covers Utah and Nevada. All other States have their own offices. Members of these field offices mail out questionnaires to volunteer crop reporters and also collect data for the crop report by travelling through the areas assigned to them, using special equipment and special methods for surveys on agricultural conditions. From data thus obtained the State statisticians and their assistants prepare the State estimates. These estimates are sealed and mailed to the Crop Reporting Board, Bureau of Agricultural Economics, in Washington, D.C., except those on speculative crops, such as corn and wheat. Reports on the speculative crops are sent to Washington in envelopes addressed to the Secretary of Agriculture. As they come to the Secretary's office, they are dropped into a metal mail box that can be unlocked only with two keys - one

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held by the Secretary of Agriculture, or his representative, and the other by the chairman of the Crop Reporting Board. On the day set for the release of a crop report, a representative of the Secretary of Agriculture and the chairman of the board, accompanied by an armed guard, unlock the box, collect the State reports, and carry them to the board room. Here board members - crop specialists and statisticians - are ready to prepare the current crop report for the country as a whole.

All contact between the board and the outside world is cut off during the preparation of the report. The door at each end of the corridor from which the crop reporting rooms open is locked. An armed guard stationed outside keeps anyone inside the "lock-up" from coming out and anyone without a pass from going in. Whoever happens to be inside when the board meets or comes in later must stay there until the hour set for the release of the report to the public - 11 a.m. for cotton reports, 12 noon for livestock, and 3 p.m. for price and general crop reports. The windows in every room are tightly shuttered by a special sealing device. Telephone and telegraph connections are broken. These safeguards are designed to prevent any possible leak, which might give speculators a tip that would enable them to manipulate the market to their advantage. They were set up in 1905, when, it was alleged, signals flashed from a window in a crop reporting room enabled a group of cotton traders to make a tidy profit.

The Secretary of Agriculture enters the lock-up shortly before the release hour to sign the new report. Then the board chairman, flanked by two armed guards, carries copies of the report to a room outside the lock-up equipped with complete communication facilities. Here press correspondents toe a line until, as the hour strikes, a signal sends them on the jump to telephones connected with their offices. Messengers wait for mimeographed copies of the report to be rushed to interested people and agencies. Department telegraph operators put the report on the wires. Thus, press and radio soon flash around the world up-to-the minute news on the agricultural situation in the United States.

(The accompanying pictures show the main steps in the preparation of an official crop report. Glossy 8 by 10 prints of any of the pictures here reproduced in miniature are free to writers and editors on request to Press Service, Office of Information, U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington 25, D.C.)

